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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0019  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0141

C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 001083

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/19/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: A BAD MOON RISING?

REF: A. (A) 08 DUSHANBE 851  
[1B.](#) (B) 07 DUSHANBE 1772

Classified By: Ambassador Tracey A. Jacobson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

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[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: A prominent politician and a political analyst do not foresee significant political changes in Tajikistan in the next few years. President Rahmon is a clever politician who has learned to resolve conflicts between factions and prevented serious challenges to his rule. However, he has charted an unstable future for his country through economic mismanagement and a short-sighted religious policy. End summary.

[¶](#)2. (SBU) On August 11, PolOff met with Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, a Senator in Tajikistan's upper house of parliament (Majlisi Milli), who has no party affiliation. In the early 1990s, he was the country's senior religious figure, or Qozi Kalon. (This position has evolved into the Head of the Council of Ulamo). He won a seat in Tajikistan's parliament in 1995, and in 1998 President Rahmon appointed him First Deputy Prime Minister. Rahmon removed him from this position in 2005, but appointed him to the Majlisi Milli. His father, Eshoni Turajon, was one of the country's most respected religious leaders during the Soviet period; his brother, Nuriddin, has carried on this tradition as the imam-hatib of the largest mosque in Vahdat.

[¶](#)3. (SBU) On August 19, PolOff and a visiting staff delegation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met with Rashid Ghani Abdullo, a political analyst. Abdullo worked in the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies, and he was one of the Embassy's first employees in 1992. He studied in the United States on a Fulbright scholarship, and he worked for the UN peacekeeping mission until it closed in [¶](#)2007. He now works for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, an international NGO based in the United Kingdom.

SMOOTH OPERATOR

[¶](#)3. (C) Neither Turajonzoda nor Abdullo see the possibility of significant political change in the coming years. Despite the country's immense economic hardships, Rahmon has proven to be an agile political operator. He has learned how to resolve conflicts between political factions, and he has prevented anyone emerging to seriously challenge his hold on power. When conflicts arise, such as in Khorog (reftel A), he is patient, waits for factions to show themselves, and then negotiates with them. Turajonzoda predicted there would be political stability for "at least the next four or five years." Abdullo said this period would be even longer: "Rahmon is a young man by Central Asian standards ) he is only 55."

[¶](#)4. (C) President Rahmon surrounded himself with those who do

not have presidential ambitions. Rahmon dismissed Turajonzoda in 2005 because he had become very popular; Rahmon appointed him to parliament when he was able to convince Rahmon that he had no intention of running for president in 2006. Rahmon was content to keep the current Prime Minister, Oqil Oqilov, in his position - despite the fact that he has reached retirement age ) because he does not have his eyes on the presidency. Rahmon did not have to worry about attacks from the opposition. The strongest opposition party, the Islamic Revival Party, did not attack his Achilles heels ) a bad economy and recurring winter crises.

#### MONEY FOR NOTHING

15. (C) Abdullo said all of Tajikistan's senior economic officials and advisors were Soviet-era thinkers who could not manage a transition to a modern economy. He contrasted Tajikistan with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where younger officials had been brought in to introduce new ideas and methods to the economy. Rahmon, however, was reluctant to bring in new blood; it was hard to find a pragmatic business-minded figure who had no political ambitions. An important indicator would be the office of the Prime Minister: if Oqilov's successor was a young business person, there is potential for change. If the successor was another Soviet-style apparatchik, serious economic reform was unlikely.

#### LOSING MY RELIGION

16. (C) Turajonzoda termed the government's religious policy "short-sighted." About four years ago, Deputy Minister of Culture Murodali Davlatov consulted Turajonzoda about trying to establish Rahmon as Tajikistan's religious leader; at the time, Turajonzoda compared Rahmon to King Henry VIII. While Tajikistan has not established its equivalent of the Anglican Church, Rahmon has attempted to subtly position himself as a spiritual as well as political leader, and has included in his speeches the concept that "religion must serve the government." Tajiks view President Rahmon's references to religious authority with skepticism, however. Davlatov, a key figure on religious issues, hurt the government's credibility because of his "reputation as an atheist," and because of his corrupt practices (reftel B). After almost fifty officials complained about him at a government meeting, Rahmon removed him from the Ministry and made him the head of a new Center for Islamic Studies.

17. (C) The official religious hierarchy in Tajikistan differed greatly from the actual religious hierarchy. The actual religious hierarchy was composed of imams who think independently of the government. The official religious hierarchy ) such as members of the Council of Ulamo ) was a means for the government to control religious life, which Turajonzoda believes to be an impossible goal. It was of great concern that a generation of religious Tajiks is growing up without a solid understanding of what it actually means to be Muslim.

18. (C) Comment: In general terms, the comments of Turajonzoda and Abdullo are reasonable. Rahmon's desire to crush potential rivals could explain why presidential brother in law Hasan Asadullozoda has taken on a lower profile than in the past. The observation that resolving unrest in Khorog is evidence that Rahmon can still effectively handle political conflicts differs from our conclusion in reftel A. Their belief that there will be no significant political changes in the near future runs counter to those who cite an increasingly disaffected public and the prospect of another winter crisis as factors that could affect the continued stability of the regime. However, it is true that Rahmon has no serious rivals and it is difficult to envision change in the current environment. Without more government attention to the longer term challenges that Tajikistan is facing, however, future stability looks ever more tenuous. End comment.

